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## THE TEACHING OF IDEALS<sup>1</sup>

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I infer from the fact that the topic "The Teaching of Ideals" has been selected for discussion this afternoon that there is a very general recognition among the teaching profession that the time is ripe for some shifting of the emphasis in education from the intellectual to the moral part of man. Although I do not suppose that it is necessary to argue for the importance of moral education, you will perhaps bear with me if I remind you of certain things which we must all take for granted in this discussion. In the first place, the most important thing about a man is what he cares for; what he places first; what he prefers. This is going to determine, more than anything else, what a man *does*—what part he plays in society and in life. Are we to allow the end which a man adopts to be the result of chance influences, or are we to see to it that his end, like his judgment and his opinions, is formed, in part at least, by enlightened guidance? You are familiar with at least the first two pages of Aristotle's *Ethics*. You will recall that Aristotle says that every vocation has an end of its own. The end of shipbuilding is the ship; the end of industry is wealth. If this is the case, says Aristotle, it must follow that there is some end which is similarly related to that general vocation which we must all adopt—the vocation, namely, of human life. It is the necessity of considering this fundamental question with what light is available that is the most fundamental justification of moral education.

But there are several reasons which make moral education peculiarly necessary at the present time. It is obvious that authority is much shaken, that established ideals, whether of church or state or social caste, have a diminished weight. In a democratic community, like our own, we cannot even trust much to the principle of honor or *noblesse oblige*. In the place of these

<sup>1</sup> Read at the meeting of the Harvard Teachers' Association, Cambridge, Massachusetts, March 7, 1914.

authorities we have the characteristic and novel phenomenon of vogue—novel, at any rate, in the proportions which it has reached. Vogue is less reliable than authority or even custom. While it exerts all the enormous force of social opinion and imitation, it may be quite arbitrary and capricious in its sources. All of these considerations argue the necessity of conscious guidance in the matter of moral ideals. We may add the increasing strain on the moral fiber of individuals, which is due to the growing complexity of our social and industrial life. We may add also the fact that the great unsolved problems of the day, the problems which as citizens we are asked to solve, are ethical problems. Our most important political and economic questions are at bottom ethical questions.

Turning now from the need of moral education, what can be said of the resources at our command? The comparative emphasis upon the intellectual side of education in the period just closing may be said to reflect the characteristics of psychology. Scientific psychology has tended to emphasize the introspective and cognitive aspect of the mental life. An important change now appears to be taking place. We hear much of what is called “functional” and “behaviorist” psychology. It is becoming characteristic of this science to think of human nature in the dynamic rather than in the static way; to regard mind as essentially an organ or means of adaptation in which cognition is only part of a process which, in its totality, is active or practical. In addition to this general tendency, it is possible to set down a summary of psychological conclusions which may be employed in moral education. The science of human nature has latterly become so complicated that one is, I think, surprised to find out how much unanimity of opinion may actually be found. I believe that it is not incorrect to say that there is a fairly definite idea of human nature, different from that generally accepted a generation or so ago, but now regarded as settled fact. Let me sum up briefly what I take to be this new idea. The lower stratum of human nature is made up of a very rich manifold of impulses, which are largely identical in form with those of animal life. These primitive impulses are neither virtuous nor vicious. They constitute the raw material out of which either virtuous or vicious living may be organized. They

constitute the link, not only between man and the animal kingdom, but between man and his savage ancestors. These impulses are congenital and, although useful, tend to be blind or automatic. They bring man to act without calculation of consequences. In respect to this fundamental stratum of his nature, man does not seek pleasure, or act consciously on grounds of self-interest, but does things simply because he possesses the native impulses so to act. But these primitive impulses, although they are specific, are also plastic. They may be modified and combined in various ways and so enter into what we call "second nature." Thus, the instinct of pugnacity may be so modified as to assume the form of a habit of killing Mexicans with a six-shooter drawn from one's hip pocket; or it may be combined with love of property, the love of kind, and with other like instincts to form a sentiment of patriotism.

The importance of this for moral education lies in the following fact: If these primitive impulses lie beneath the surface of man's habitual and rationalized life, it follows that a man may be moved, controlled, or molded by one who knows how to appeal to them. As springs of action they may be set off by one who knows how to touch them. Furthermore, if these primitive impulses may be developed through experience into a "second nature," it follows that by the deliberate use of similar influences this "second nature" may, to some extent, be remade or be reconstructed. It is a matter of first importance to distinguish between those aspects of human nature which are secondary and acquired and which are, therefore, a function of external influences, and those primitive and inalienable aspects which must be regarded as ultimate and fatal.

When it comes to the use which is to be made of such knowledge of human nature, I hold it to be very important to distinguish between what can be called the "paternalistic" and the "fraternalistic" methods of moral education. Your method is paternalistic when you keep your knowledge to yourself and use it to control and regulate some other human being for ends which you do not impart to your victim. Your aim may be benevolent, that is to say, you may suppose that you know what is good for your victim better than he can know himself, but this does not affect the principle. By the fraternalistic method, on the other hand, I mean that procedure in which I take my victim into my confidence.

But in this case, of course, he ceases to be a victim, and we work together with a common knowledge for a common end.

I take it that, up to a certain point, moral education must be paternalistic. There must be a period, more or less prolonged, in which the teacher knows the end and in which the child cannot possibly understand it. During this period it is necessary that moral education should have a victim. It is necessary that the child should be regarded simply as material to be made into something. And during this period the parent or teacher, through his knowledge of the child's springs of action, may play upon his impulses and evoke action that will tend toward the formation of sound ideals and virtuous habits. Certainly moral education in this paternalistic phase can accomplish much. If any of you are interested in the political uses of the same method, I commend to you Mr. Graham Wallas' *Human Nature in Politics*. It is full of information and illustration drawn from direct acquaintance with political procedure. You will learn there how politicians have more or less unconsciously played upon the instincts and primitive impulses of the voters.

But I want more especially to say that one should regard this paternalistic phase of moral education as a phase to be outgrown as soon as possible. One should endeavor to reach that relation between teacher and taught in which the end is mutually recognized, and the means mutually understood; so that both may work together, and there may be no victim, because both are admitted to one another's confidence. After all, I suspect that one need not in these days be fearful of excessive paternalism. There is a strong disinclination to be victimized, which would save most men from falling victims to those who are versed in the new psychology. A young man came into my office not long ago and, assuming a serious and sympathetic air, sat down by my desk and said, "What do you think of Emerson?" Quite unsuspecting, I allowed myself to be drawn out on that and kindred subjects. Finally, however, my visitor confessed that he was a student of the art of salesmanship. Someone had told him that it was very important to gain the confidence of the prospective purchaser by drawing him into general conversation, and so this young man saw a certain advantage in the knowledge of literature, history, and

other humanistic studies; they might supply conversational resources by which to put your victim off his guard. What I want especially to bring out is this: that from the moment that this young man betrayed himself I refused to be his victim. In my reaction to his mode of approach I represented what I suppose would be the typical human reaction. The moment we suspect that our stops are being fretted in order to make music for someone else we resent it, as Hamlet resented the approaches of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. My behavior illustrates the way in which the abuse of the knowledge of human nature may be corrected or prevented, viz., by the wide circulation of that knowledge. In a community where enlightenment is diffused, and new knowledge becomes at once common property, there are not going to be many victims.

One final word, in which again I wish to emphasize the fraternal principle in moral education. In moral education of this sort you impart to him whom you seek to teach the reasons for what you admire and deem virtuous. As a teacher of ethics, I have had the experience that the most important principles, because they are the most commonplace, tend to be hopelessly dull. How is one to make so humdrum a matter as virtue interesting? Of course one may avail one's self of external association. If you are going to teach a child to put his knife and fork down in a certain way on the plate, or to stand in the presence of his elders, you are forced to recognize the entire arbitrariness of the matter, and have no alternative but to invent fictitious reasons, or to appeal to the child's instinct of play by making a game of it. But as Quick has said, it is only the poorer sort of hand-organ which requires a monkey. Is the monkey necessary in the case of virtue? For one, I believe that it is not. I believe that the best means of making virtue interesting, as soon as you have to do with an awakened mind, is to show that it is *true*. If virtue were mere convention, it would indeed be hopelessly dull, or only fictitiously interesting. But virtue is the principle of effective living. In teaching it one may make it interesting by demonstrating its works, by illustrating from life the truth that the "wages of sin is death," or that prudence is the cause of health and efficiency, or that justice will actually promote a harmonious society, or that humanity and devotion are effective in the furtherance of civilization and progress.